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RUEHSA/AMEMBASSY PRETORIA 1705  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 000326

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/12/2019

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SUBJECT: (C) NIGERIA: NAPTIP'S NEW LEADER CAUSES CONCERN

Classified By: Political Counselor Walter Pflaumer for reasons 1.4. (b & d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: Carol Ndaguba, Executive Secretary of the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP), was "officially retired" on February 19 and replaced by Simon Egede, a close confidante to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of the Federation (AGF) Michael Aondoakaa. (Note: NAPTIP is a government agency that falls under the authority of the Ministry of Justice. End Note.) The news came as a shock to Ndaguba as well as the many stakeholders in Abuja who have had a close working relationship with NAPTIP over the past five years. According to Ndaguba, Egede has no experience with trafficking in persons (TIP) issues or running a law enforcement agency. Ndaguba, other foreign Embassies, and NGOs have all voiced concern about the future of NAPTIP under the new leadership. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) During a January 29 meeting with Poloff, Carol Ndaguba had mentioned that she would be retiring within the calendar year because she was about to turn 65. Ndaguba had believed, however, that her retirement was still some months off, time she was hoping to use to prepare a credible replacement. She noted that Minister of Justice Aondoakaa would likely try to appoint "one of his guys" as the new Executive Secretary, a possibility which she viewed as problematic for the agency, given the rampant corruption within his Ministry. Ndaguba recalled that Aondoakaa had repeatedly tried to coerce her into hiring colleagues of his, and that she upset him and others by refusing to do so. She had insisted, however, she would not hire unqualified people to work at NAPTIP, since maintaining the reputation of the agency was one of her top priorities.

13. (C) On February 20, the Nigerian press reported that Ndaguba had been "fired." When Poloff reached her later that day, Ndaguba confirmed that she had been "officially retired" by the AGF on the previous day, February 19. She told Poloff she was surprised by the timing of the AGF's decision and saddened that she was not consulted before a new Executive Sec was appointed. When asked about her replacement, Simon Egede, Ndaguba said she had not yet met him; but noted that he was a Special Assistant and Attorney for Aondoakaa. (Comment: Although Post has had no previous contact with Egede, we believe him to be a close confidante of the AGF.

Egede comes from Benue State, same as Aondoakaa, and was Lead Counsel for him in the wrongful dismissal case brought by Nuhu Ribadu, former Chairman of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC). End comment.) Ndaguba added that Egede had no particular experience dealing with trafficking in persons or running a law enforcement agency and she was concerned about the future of NAPTIP under the new leadership. When Poloff spoke to contacts from foreign Embassies and NGOs who have worked with NAPTIP over the past few years about the situation, they all expressed shock over the suddenness of Ndaguba's "retirement" and shared similar concerns about Egede's lack of experience and ties to the AGF.

14. (C) COMMENT: We are concerned about NAPTIP's future now that Aondoakaa has a tighter and more direct grip on the agency. Although there are still a number of highly respected officers within the senior leadership of NAPTIP (particularly Director of Investigations Muhammad Babandede and Director of Prosecutions U.S. Haruna), we will watch for signs of increased corruption and decreased effectiveness, similar to those we have seen with the EFCC's performance over the past year. We will also watch closely to see if any additional people are dismissed or reassigned and replaced by others from Aondoakaa's network. Stakeholders in Abuja, including foreign Embassies and NGOs, have agreed to meet in the near future to discuss the implications of the change in NAPTIP leadership, and post will make efforts to meet with Egede in person to get a better read on these developments. END COMMENT.

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15. (U) This cable was coordinated with Consulate Lagos.  
SANDERS